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A-ONE Online Magazine  
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor  
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor  
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor  
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"  
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"  
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"  
Rob Mahlert -- Web site  
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"  
"\*\*\*\*\*"

Sorry for the late release for this week's issue! It was just about ready to hit the streets, but it as getting late and I was overly tired this week. So, after a morning work shift, I've put the finishing touches on, and here we are again!

This past week marked the 13th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. Many somber ceremonies throughout the country to remember that fateful day. and those who were injured and lost.

And, as I mentioned a few weeks ago, we're again reminded of the constant threat of terrorism throughout the world. And, the world seems to have grown much smaller, knowing that our country is quite susceptible to a variety of attacks - directly and indirectly. Clearly, we haven't done enough in these past 13 years to effectively deal with terrorism and its many ideologies. Think we're a little overdue?

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Destiny And The Rise of Battle-tested Video Games!  
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!  
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Destiny And The Rise of Battle-tested Video Games

The hugely anticipated sci-fi video game Destiny is finally with us.

It's taken 500 people five years to produce and is intended to be the first part in an ongoing space opera that will span multiple games over the next decade.

The studio behind it, Bungie, was given a budget bigger than many Hollywood blockbusters after the success of its earlier Halo games.

Yet it still felt the need to first host an "alpha" and then a "beta" public test fairly late in the day, allowing large numbers of players the chance to shoot-and-loot across fairly extensive areas of the unfinished title for free.

If publisher Activision was confident enough to boast that Destiny would be the "best-selling new video game IP [intellectual property] in history" in February, why were these two trials subsequently needed?

Was it really to make a better game, or could it be a tactic to hook gamers into pre-ordering new titles?

Games developers have long carried out tests to collect valuable data and feedback that they can then use to shape their finished products.

In fact, the idea of public alphas and betas has been around on the PC for a long time, with shooters such as Unreal Tournament and Counter-Strike popularising the concept in the late 1990s.

On consoles, such tests have tended to be "closed", involving only staff or vetted individuals, although there have been some exceptions, such as Halo 3.

Either way, these tests have tended to occur several months - and sometimes more than a year - before a game's release.

By contrast Destiny's 10-day-long beta ended just over six weeks ago.

"In the case of Destiny, it will have been heavily tested behind closed doors well before the beta launched," explains Chris Dring, editor of UK games industry trade magazine MCV.

"This beta was more designed to test the game with a larger audience."

Involving so many people becomes critical when you consider that Destiny and many other of the latest titles put multiplayer gaming at their core. Fighting alongside or against other players is no longer an add-on, but at the heart of the game.

Large betas allow a developer to test the strain on its servers, which need to seamlessly and simultaneously communicate with millions of people around the globe.

"The Destiny beta was played by over 4.5 million people," says David Dague, Bungie's community manager.

"At one point, it became the most simultaneously played game in our company's history."

Experts have predicted that Destiny could attract 10 million "day one"

players, and Activision is keen to avoid it becoming the latest internet-reliant title to suffer major technical issues at launch.

Memories still loom large of the struggles of Grand Theft Auto V Online - which didn't have a beta test and had to reset player progress during launch week - and SimCity - which only had a closed beta and saw purchasers offered a free game to compensate them for enduring its sluggish play and glitches.

While Destiny has held one of the biggest open betas to date, it is not the only one to turn to the tactic in recent months.

"What we're looking for is all of the little stuff that we may have overlooked or have been unable to achieve with a limited amount of people playing," explains Phil Robb, creative director of the studio behind forthcoming title Evolve.

Turtle Rock Studios' four-on-one monster hunting game recently delayed its release until February 2015 after hosting a "closed" alpha test on PCs.

It has since scheduled an "open" Xbox One beta for January.

Like Destiny's beta, that sounds rather late in the day for make-or-break tests, but one expert said there was sense to such scheduling.

"[I] disagree that they are 'so late that the developer really doesn't have time' to use what they learn," states Michael Pachter, digital medial analyst at Wedbush Securities.

"They can fix things on the fly, and can change things via update, so I don't see the knowledge as wasted."

Indeed, it's increasingly common for developers to provide release-day updates that gamers are urged to install before playing for the first time. PlayStation 4 owners already have a 296MB patch for Destiny to download.

"The more chances you have to get the product into gamers' hands, the more likely you are to find that stuff before release," notes Mr Robb.

Even so, some industry watchers suggest betas also serve as a valuable marketing tool to drive purchases before discounts and second-hand sales have a chance to erode earnings.

"Releasing a beta is a big vote of confidence in a title," explains Lewis Ward, director of gaming at market analysis company IDC.

"It's like the developer or publisher saying, 'Here you go. You know you won't be able to resist this once it comes out.'"

"Assuming the beta is of good enough quality, and the Destiny beta was for me, then it will help seed additional sales through viral word of mouth."

Of course, public reaction can go both ways.

"You run the risk of some people not understanding what a beta is, and that could potentially have a negative impact," acknowledges Steve Papoutsis, executive producer on the forthcoming cops-and-robbers themed Battlefield Hardline.

It held a public beta in June, and was subsequently pushed back from an October release until "early 2015", with a second beta ordered.

"One of the reasons EA gave us more time on Battlefield Hardline was so we could actually act on the feedback that was provided," he adds.

Bobby Kotick, chief executive of Activision, raised eyebrows in May when he told a conference that his company was taking a "\$500m bet" on Destiny.

The company later clarified that the sum included marketing and other costs - but it meant the title was instantly hailed as the most expensive video game to date.

Commentators noted that Grand Theft Auto V had cost about about half the sum to make and promote.

But analyst Michael Pachter suggests Mr Kotick's figure is overstated.

"I think Activision put a number out there that is pretty meaningless," he told the BBC.

"The game cost around \$180m to make, and its initial marketing budget will likely be \$100m, so they will spend \$280m before they sell the first copy.

"After that, 'costs' probably include the manufacturer's royalty and the setting up of a server farm and call centre infrastructure, as well as continuing development costs on downloadable content (DLC), etc.

"I think the number is way overblown, and too widely reported, and it was put out there so that people like you would ask people like me about it."

Mr Ward is convinced the beta trend will become more prevalent.

Indies and crowdfunded game will benefit, he says, from offering their backers early access.

Meanwhile the bigger budgeted titles can negotiate first access to their trials in return for extra publicity from either Sony or Microsoft, for whom it can offer a more cost-effective way to differentiate their platforms than funding exclusive titles of their own.

There's also the suggestion that people enjoy playing unfinished titles over the course of several days more than playing a short demo of a completed section, as used to be the case.

"Gamers seem to like being involved in the development process," suggests Mr Dring.

"Destiny was always going to be a big hit.

"But it was that beta that made it the fastest selling new brand in video games industry history."

#### Grand Theft Auto V Headed to PS4, Xbox One

If you've been eagerly awaiting the release of Grand Theft Auto V on the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, we have good news.

Developer Rockstar Games on Friday announced it will launch the crime game on Sony and Microsoft's latest-generation game consoles on Nov. 18. PC gamers will have to wait until Jan. 27 to get their hands on the game.

But for the long wait, expect some added perks. The PS4, Xbox One, and PC versions will feature "a range of major visual and technical upgrades to make Los Santos and Blaine County more immersive than ever," Rockstar said. "In addition to increased draw distances and higher resolution, players can expect a range of additions and improvements."

That includes new weapons, vehicles, and activities; additional wildlife; denser traffic; a new foliage system; and enhanced damage and weather effects. GTA 5 for PS4 and Xbox One will also feature enhanced radio selections with more than 100 new songs and DJ mixes across the title's 17 stations.

Those who pre-order will get \$1,000,000 of in-game bonus cash to spend across GTA V and GTA Online.

The game originally launched for PS3 and Xbox 360 in October 2013. But those who purchased GTA 5 for the older consoles will be getting some goodies, too. That includes classic vehicles from across the GTA series such as the Dukes, the Dodo Seaplane, and a faster Blimp; new shooting range challenges and wildlife photography activities; and new weapons. Meanwhile, GTA Online will get an increased player count, with room for 30 players on PS4 and Xbox One.

Current players will be able to transfer their GTA Online characters and progression to the PS4, Xbox One, or PC.

#### Microsoft Nears Deal To Buy Minecraft Maker Mojang

Microsoft Corp is in serious discussions to buy Mojang AB, the Swedish company behind the popular "Minecraft" video game, The Wall Street Journal said, citing a person with knowledge of the matter.

The deal is be valued at more than \$2 billion and could be signed as early as this week, the Journal reported.

"Minecraft" is a game where players build structures with blocks to protect against nocturnal monsters.

The acquisition will add to Microsoft's Xbox video game business, at a time when the competition in the video game console market is heating up.

Microsoft said in April it had shipped 5 million Xbox One units to retailers worldwide since the launch. In the same month Sony Corp. said it had sold more than 7 million PlayStation 4 units as of April 6 and was struggling to keep up with consumer demand.

Microsoft declined to comment.

Happy 15th Birthday, Sega Dreamcast!

Few stars have burned as brightly and burned out as quickly as Sega's Dreamcast console.

Adored by players from the moment it was announced in 1998, the system was truly ahead of its time. Even today, on the 15th anniversary of its debut, the Dreamcast has a fan base more loyal than many modern systems.

Boasting sharp graphics, revolutionary online multiplayer capabilities, and an embarrassment of game software riches, the Dreamcast enjoyed massive prerelease orders and seemed poised to put Sega back on top of the console world after it floundered with the Sega Saturn.

Unfortunately, it was doomed from the start. Released on Sept. 9, 1999, the Dreamcast hit the market just prior to Sony's PlayStation 2, which stole Sega's thunder en route to becoming the best-selling home console ever. From end to end, the Dreamcast lasted only 19 months on U.S. shelves.

But what a 19 months it was.

SoulCalibur. Crazy Taxi. Shenmue. Jet Grind Radio. Skies of Arcadia. NFL 2K. Heck, even Seaman. Few systems have had such an impressive lineup of games in their lifespans, much less in just a year and a half.

Even more impressive? The Dreamcast was the first system to feature a built-in modem, enabling online play for all users right out of the box over the frail but functional SegaNet service. The first NFL game to feature online play? NFL 2K. The first online RPG on a console? Phantasy Star Online. Undoubtedly, the Dreamcast was a groundbreaker.

Not everyone was on board, however. Most notably, Electronic Arts refused to support the Dreamcast, though to this day, there's no consensus on the reason for that divide. EA maintains that Sega's hardware choices and hardball negotiation tactics caused the publisher to walk away. Former Sega boss Bernie Stolar always maintained that EA didn't want to compete with Visual Concepts, the makers of NFL 2K.

Ultimately, though, it wasn't partner squabbles or even the PlayStation 2 that doomed the Dreamcast; it was Sega's weak bottom line.

The company's arcade business was doing well at the time, but it was otherwise strapped for cash. As Sony, then at the height of its power, began to market the PS2, it easily outspent Sega, shifting consumer awareness and cashing in on the brand loyalty it had created with the original PlayStation.

Sega's then-spokesman Charles Bellfield and his newly minted marketing chief Peter Moore (who went on to lead Microsoft's Xbox division and is currently chief operating officer of EA) saw the writing on the wall and delivered a report to their bosses in Japan called "Manifesto of the Future," which declared that Sega had to remove itself from the video game hardware business and focus solely on software if it was to survive.

I remember it like it was yesterday, said Bellfield in 2009. We presented a strategy in September 2000 that said we were not viable as a hardware player in the States beyond Christmas 2000 and that we needed to get out of the hardware business. That meeting was the first time Japan had ever heard that we could not be successful against the power of

Microsoft, who had not yet announced their intention to come into the space, but we knew they were.

When we told them that staying in the hardware business was not our advice, the next thing that happened was all of the heads of all the studios got up and walked out without saying a word. That, in the Japanese culture, is pretty rude. But they were shocked.

Ultimately, of course, Bellfield and Moore were right, and despite some troubles along the way (we're looking at you, Sonic), Sega is still going strong as a publisher.

Fans, though, have had a hard time letting go. To this day, they hold out hope for a Dreamcast 2 announcement (it s not happening, folks) and point out that the system actually outsold Nintendo s Wii U in comparable time frames.

But while the Dreamcast may be gone forever, it left a legacy in the gaming world that few modern machines can match.

I don't think it's an understatement to say that the Dreamcast and its online network laid the ground for what we all take for granted today: online game play, linking innumerable gamers from around the world to play, compete and collaborate, as well as enabling new content to be delivered in addition to that which was delivered on the disc, Moore said to mark the anniversary.

Rarely does a week go by where I don't bump into somebody that fondly reminisces about this wonderful piece of hardware and the great times they had (and are still having!) playing some of its superb games. So as we all enjoy everything the next generation of hardware has to offer, give a tip of the hat (or glass) this evening to The Little Console That Could.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online      -      Online Users Growl & Purr!
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## How Atari's New Bosses Plan To Bring The Company Back From The Brink

Atari is still a name that everyone even those outside of the games industry seems to know.

And yet for most people the name is synonymous with a period of gaming that's long gone. Atari conjures up images of wood-clad consoles and dingy, neon-lit arcades. Oh, and a bunch of ET cartridges buried in the New Mexican desert.

That's a bit unfair, seeing as the company put out a semi-steady stream of games after that period passed away. It wasn't enough, though, and Atari recently filed for bankruptcy. It was in this most dire of times that gaming's progenitor was rescued by former employee Fred Chesnais,



now CEO of Atari.

Atari under Chesnais is a revitalized company. There's an Alone in the Dark reboot in the works, as well as a proper PC successor to Rollercoaster Tycoon 3. And...a new version of Asteroids?

I sat down with Chesnais and Atari COO Todd Shallbetter recently to discuss Atari's new strategy, where the two see the company heading, and a ton of other topics. The full transcript is below.

Frederic Chesnais (FC), CEO of Atari: First, Atari's been here for a long time. I think the team today has been here for about ten years on average, if not more. I was CEO/COO of many divisions and entities of the group fifteen years ago. I stayed there for eight years, I left, created my own games. Then when Atari filed for bankruptcy I decided to buy it back, so to say.

It's not really "Why now?" It's more like, "What happened during the five or six years during which Atari was still doing games, but maybe was not as present or was doing other types of games?"

Now we're back trying to be really relevant in the PC world. Why PC? Because I think it is the best platform. It's the most open. You can reach out to a lot of people. It's very flexible. And for the last few years I've been doing a lot of PC games myself, so for me it was natural. When you look at the franchises we have, such as Rollercoaster Tycoon yeah, it's a PC game, it'll be released on PC again with the new one. For me it was really obvious as the first choice for the big game for the comeback of Atari.

At the same time we are also pushing in other directions. It's not just about games. We also do licensing, so we are launching Atari Flashback, which is a replica of the original Atari 2600. And there will be more. We're also launching two casino platforms, one that is for real money outside of the US and in selected states in the US, and then we have a social casino that will be virtual money.

So it's games, casino gaming or gambling, and then licensing. We've been absent for at least eighteen months. Atari filed for bankruptcy in January. It's over, it's behind us, and now we're very pleased to bring the games. That's very exciting.

Todd Shallbetter (TS), COO of Atari: And I think, to the "Why now?" part as Fred said, he came back and kind of rescued the company frankly and gave us this opportunity to be completely scaled. We have a very experienced core team, and it affords us the opportunity to take this catalogue of over 220 trademarked Atari [intellectual properties]...the sky's the limit when you start with that sort of resource.

Fred came in, we're recapitalized, we have a great nimble team, a very creative team, an aggressive and hungry team. In this space it's certainly a departure from the publisher models of past. It affords us the opportunity to really exploit these IPs.

FC: When Todd says we are organized differently, it's true. Our business has changed dramatically during the last fifteen years. Fifteen years ago, even in just the PC world, you had to have a box, you had to have distributors all over the place. It was very expensive to make a game. Today we can just do a game and distribute it ourselves or with the help of great partners such as Steam.

And production has changed as well. I come from a world where I think the business model of the motion picture industry is really relevant, because we're all doing entertainment. The model where you have, like a movie production studio, where you have the executive production, the brand, the marketing, you don't want to have all those stages inside your own company. So what do you do? You go to the best.

Fred Chesnais was an employee at Atari a decade ago before taking over as CEO.

We do the same. We go to the best studios and we try to make the best games, but after that we stay very nimble. If there's another opportunity we'll go to another studio that's maybe the best at what it's doing.

So I think the organization is today very focused and very limited to the core team and the core experience. After that we go to the best guys to have the best games. You cannot have all the Spielbergs of the world inside your own studio. It's just impossible. But what you can do is try to find them and work with each other.

How do you move Atari forward and not just rely on the back catalogue of 220 IPs and the accompanying nostalgia?

FC: First, in the game world we are creating new IPs. The new one that's been announced is a game for the LGBT community called Pridefest. That's part of the DNA of Atari to invent, to go after new audiences and reach to a lot of new people and new gamers. It's also part of my DNA because when I left Atari I went out on my own and created fitness games for the Wii and the Wii Balance Board.

In games we try to be really relevant. We create new IPs. We also try to reinvent existing IPs... [like] Alone in the Dark. You will hear a lot more about Asteroids in the next few weeks. It's a PC game. It's going to be a survival game on the asteroids. There's also a lot of survival games for PC. In the games space we try to be very relevant.

Yeah, this Asteroids.

We also try to go outside of games. Clearly gambling, Atari Casino, is outside of games and a way for us to reach out to a new audience. I can tell you the audience playing casino games is not the same as the audience playing Alone in the Dark. There's some overlap always, but it's not the same. We try to go outside of games, but it's not a hit-and-run project. We're going to be here for some time.

For the moment what we try to do is come back, be relevant, make sure we have the best games.

TS: And I would also add to that too, these developers we're working with are using Unreal 4, Unity 5 shortly. Using these technologies and these tools to create next-gen sort of quality in these games. Just the distribution schema, there's not the box, manufacturing, all that stuff. We're going direct to the consumer and coming right into their boxes on their desks. That's very important. We're blessed with all these fans, and they're really connected fans. We exploit that.

FC: Back to the business model and why I personally love PC games: You launch a game take any game on Steam you take the game on the day of

release, you take the game one year later, two years later, it's not the same game.

I've been involved with games released two years ago, I can tell you the game today is still the same but it's not the same. The great thing about PC games is you can really engage with the community, you can listen to the community, you can fix your game overnight because we all make mistakes. There are always bugs in games, not because the developers are bad but because you simply can't replicate a situation in the studio where you have thousands of computers. We're creating highly sophisticated games, so we'll always have bugs.

But to stay relevant in the business, when you have a great franchise, keep working on it. World of WarCraft is what, ten years old? When they released the game, who would've known ten years later it'd still be receiving updates and patches with new features? That's the amazing thing about PC games. You start, and if you make a mistake you correct it. Sometimes you have to stop it because clearly there's no market and no one loves your game. Okay, too bad, let's move on to the next one.

But as a publisher, we can stay relevant and engage with the community for one year, two years, three years.

Do you consider your gambling initiative a way to fund riskier games on the narrative side or are they entirely separate?

FC: We're in the business of making games. We have to stay on the same path. We have to make sure we stay solvent.

But I'd say money comes second. The first thing is "Can we create a game or product that will attract a lot of users?" Why casino? I feel like it was a natural step for us, instead of going in other directions. I think there's a small bridge or step to go from games to gambling. After that I think we can maybe attract our audience from games to gambling a little bit.

It's not purely a financial investment because otherwise I would put the money of the company somewhere else or I'd take more risks. It's a question of taking advantage of the brand and pushing it towards where the people who know the brand are.

TS: And keep in mind there was an original 2600 game, Atari Casino. And as an adjunct to that, the original Pong machine was for a very different audience. We're now very much a family-focused and inclusive company across the board, but these games were in nightclubs and bars and people were fighting to stack their quarters to get them in. It's appealing to a little bit older demographic, and there's a certain love of the brand in some of those demographics that's very active in the casino space as well.

FC: And especially on the PC you have games and gambling, but you'll have a new category soon which we call hybrid skill-based games. That's where people spend their time and we'll be there.

A few months back you discussed getting into hardware. You mentioned the Flashback earlier, but at the time you also talked about smart watches, et cetera. Is that still a plan?

FC: Yeah, it was an example we gave at the time. The key message we gave at the time was that we're an entertainment brand. Clearly we are

relevant in games, but we had the Atari 2600 at the beginning, so we are also a hardware brand. So it would be relevant for us to go into the hardware business.

That being said, you have two different questions. How, and for what type of product?

So how: we're going with a licensing business model, and the Flashback is the first one. In the very short term there's no plan to go direct with this type of business because it's very complex, it's very difficult, it's really capital-intensive.

The second question, once you've looked at how you do it, is what do you want to do? So we had examples, such as watches, such as consoles with the Atari 2600 and the Atari Flashback. There are many opportunities down the road. We'll take our time. Think about, in general, gamified products meaning a product combining the brand, some gamification, and a product that is really useful to our audience. We have no plans for this year this is for the very long run. But I think we can be relevant with some very well-selected hardware products.

Again, this relies on capitalizing on Atari's name, right? Even though Atari now is a very different company than, say, thirty years ago?

FC: It's different because of course the world is different. Every piece of this is different than it was thirty or forty years ago. But yeah, we take advantage of the brand. There's a difference between trying to make a new company and a new game without any name, or saying "Hey, we're relaunching Rollercoaster Tycoon."

Hey, the next installment of Asteroids will be here in six to eight months."

We're very motivated and excited to work on that, and hopefully the combination will provide an audience. If you look at Rollercoaster Tycoon people have tried to make some rollercoaster games, but I don't think they've been very successful so far. Because we have that in our DNA, we love the franchise, I hope that everyone will say "Wow, they were able to find the right team, put the right features, at the right time and deliver that to the market."

It's difficult to make a game, I can tell you. People think you just wake up and put a bunch of programmers in a room. It's a little bit more complex than that.

It's a great ride. We're all passionate about the brand. All the guys have more than ten years with the brand. But that doesn't mean we don't make mistakes. We all make mistakes. We all try to learn from that. But I think we'll make sure we stay relevant on PC. That's the best way to interact with the audience, listen to the audience, and deliver modifications, upgrades, and corrections very rapidly.

What kept everyone at Atari for ten years even through the downswing?

TS: Pure love of the brand, in my case. And I think certainly for others. We believe in this. We believe in this font of creativity that it's been, and it has been consistently. Even through some of those lows, there were some very good things happening. It was just a changing time in the industry.

FC: Look at me: I was there ten years ago when we launched Rollercoaster Tycoon 3. So it's really the experience of a lifetime to be able, ten years later, not to program the game don't get me wrong but to be able to put the resources so we launch a new one. People stayed because we loved the brand, and as time goes by we have more and more opportunities with the brand because more and more people know about the brand. If we wait another day, we have more opportunities.

## Atari Is Rebooting Asteroids As...A DayZ-style Survival Game

I recently got to sit down with Atari CEO Frederic Chesnais and most of what he said made total sense. "Hey, we're rebooting Rollercoaster Tycoon." Totally! "We're also rebooting Alone in the Dark!" Absolutely!" You will hear a lot more about Asteroids in the next few weeks." Great!

Wait, what?

It's true. I did a half-hour interview with Chesnais and Atari COO Todd Shallbetter recently, which you can read in full here. The craziest bit, however, is that part of Atari's big gaming comeback involves rebooting the 1979 vector-based classic Asteroids.

Yeah, this Asteroids.

And what form will this rebooted Asteroids take, thirty-five years after the fact? I'll just leave it to Chesnais to explain:

"You will hear a lot more about Asteroids in the next few weeks. It's a PC game. It's going to be a survival game on the asteroids."

A survival game. On the asteroids. In other words, this is presumably a game in the vein of DayZ, Rust, or Don't Starve but...on an asteroid. Details are scarce outside of this little tease from Chesnais. He also told me "The next installment of Asteroids will be here in six to eight months," but reaching out to a representative I was told all Atari was willing to confirm was "2015."

On the other hand, Atari was willing to confirm the game exists so...it exists. It's coming. Asteroids is being rebooted as a survival game, arriving sometime next year. More details when we have them ostensibly sometime in the next few weeks.

## Long-Buried Atari Cartridges Are Being Offered Up for Public Auction

Atari fans will soon have the opportunity to own a fabled piece of gaming history.

After a documentary crew dug up a trove of failed games that was secretly buried in a New Mexico landfill in the '80s, a city council has unanimously ruled that the 1,300 cartridges should be put on the auction block and donated to interested museums.

While a staggering 792,000 games lie within the Alamogordo landfill, according to dig site manager Joe Lewandowski, only 1,300 have been

recovered thus far from under 10,000 pounds of garbage, reports Polygon. Among them is E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (1982) - often panned as the worst video game of all time and which many blame for the video game crash of 1983.

Eight hundred games will initially be offered on eBay in order to determine their value and generate interest, Lewandowski said. Each cartridge will ship with a certificate of authenticity and a document explaining the now-infamous Atari tomb tale.

Lewandowski told Polygon that New Mexico had already received a \$500 offer for one game, while a normal (non-buried) E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial cartridge can sell on eBay for as little as \$9.

But even before a sale, the priority will be distributing the rescued games to interested museums. The local historical society is working with the New Mexico Museum of Space History to inventory, catalog and seal the collection. Each interested party - which already includes the Museum of Rome - will be lent a handful unearthed games, controllers and consoles, as well as photos of the site and background information about the four-year excavation process.

Meanwhile, the documentary depicting the burial - which is coincidentally being produced by Xbox and is entitled Atari: Game Over - is slated for release later this fall.

#### Unearthed E.T., Atari Games Approved for Release to Museums, Auction Block

The long-buried collection of E.T. and other Atari game cartridges unearthed in a documentary earlier this year will soon be bound to a museum in Rome, Italy, a series of auctions and storage in a space museum, the Alamogordo, New Mexico city council voted this week.

In a 7-0 vote on Tuesday, the city council approved plans for the distribution of about 1,300 cartridges, which includes 59 Atari titles and a number of copies of E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, the famously poorly received 1982 game that some blame for the collapse of the early video game industry.

Those games, an assortment of 792,000 of them according to dig site manager Joe Lewandowski, were buried in the Alamogordo landfill at the orders of Atari officials who were struggling to deal with a glut of unwanted titles.

Over time that burial became a bit of a gaming fable, until earlier this year when Microsoft teamed up with the city to excavate some of those games from under an estimated 10,000 pounds of garbage.

In Tuesday's city council meeting, Lewandowski, who is also the vice president of the Tularosa Basin Historical Society, said that the primary goal for the games is for them to be shown at museums.

"The primary goal is that they go into museums and the story be told," he said, according to a recording of the meeting. "The second is that they go into the city inventory for whatever we decide to do with them. The balance is what we will sell."

Lewandowski suggested that about 800 of the games be auctioned off on eBay in three lots to better help judge their value and also increase interest and bidding. The first auction, likely on eBay, will hopefully start in a couple of weeks, he told Polygon. Each auctioned cartridge will come with a signed certificate of authenticity, a metal inventory tag from the city and an information handout explaining the backstory of the game's burial in the "Atari tomb," he said.

When asked what the games were worth, Lewandowski said he wasn't sure, but that the city had already received at least one offer of \$500 for one.

"Part of the problem is that the digging up of these games is a unique situation," he said. "No one has ever done anything like this before and no one will probably ever do anything like this again. Yet on eBay [E.T.] is worth nine bucks a piece. But that's not a game that is part of this legend.

"There are a limited number of those. We thought we were going to get 30,000 or 40,000 games, there's 792,000 down there, but we got 1,300 and one hundred of them went to the film company so that's increased their value."

Alamogordo mayor pro-tem Robert Rentschler asked if the games had been tested to ensure they were safe after being buried in a landfill for so long. Lewandowski said they weren't but that the film company spent \$12,000 to make sure that the burial site wasn't hazardous.

With the distribution plans for the cartridges approved, the next step will be the historical society working with the New Mexico Museum of Space History in Alamogordo to properly inventory the games, catalog them, seal them and produce certificates of authenticity.

Lewandowski said the group also wants to put together collections of games from the landfill in packages that they can then lend out to interested museums. Already, the city has heard from one in Rome, Italy, he said.

Approved museums will be lent a small collection of games, controllers, game components and pieces of consoles uncovered in the dig. They will also receive a series of photos showing the burial site, the transportation and even the warehouses where the games came from. Museums will also receive information about the process. The idea, Lewandowski said, is to allow museums to create their own exhibits about the dig.

After spending four years, which stretched through four mayors, and four or five city managers, fighting to obtain the rights to dig up the Atari tomb, Lewandowski says that he's happy to be involved in telling the story as it comes to a close.

"It's kind of surreal at this point," he said. "This will never happen again. The city won't allow it. The state won't allow it."

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## US Tech Industry Steps Up Push on Surveillance Reforms

Major US technology companies joined Monday to urge Congress to quickly pass legislation to reform government surveillance in the wake of revelations of massive NSA-led data sweep programs.

A letter to Senate leaders signed by some of the largest US tech firms said reforms "are necessary to help restore public trust in both the US government and the US technology sector, as well as to continue the innovative and competitive success of the American tech sector in global markets."

The letter comes weeks after the House of Representatives passed a watered-down plan to reform the National Security Agency and its data collection capabilities, in light of revelations of widespread monitoring of phone and online communications of millions at home and overseas, based on leaked secret documents from former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

The late amendments infuriated some in Silicon Valley, and reform advocates are now pinning their hopes on the Senate version of the so-called USA Freedom Act.

But no vote is scheduled in the brief legislative session begun Monday ahead of the midterm November elections.

"As a result of the surveillance program revelations, US technology companies have experienced negative economic implications in overseas markets," said a letter endorsed by five major tech organizations that include members such as Google, Microsoft, Apple and Facebook.

"In addition, other countries are considering proposals that would limit data flows between countries, which would have a negative impact on the efficiencies upon which the borderless Internet relies. The transparency measures in the USA Freedom Act are designed to alleviate some of the concerns behind such actions by allowing companies to be more transparent about the orders they receive from the government pursuant to its surveillance authorities."

The measure pending in the Senate would curb the NSA's ability to collect bulk phone data from Americans and provides more safeguards for warrantless surveillance.

The proposal includes other privacy provisions, including the creation of a special advocate to monitor civil liberties issues before a secret US surveillance court.

## US Threatened Yahoo With Huge Fine over Emails

Yahoo's free email service could have cost the company an extra quarter of a million dollars a day.

The government called for the huge fine in 2008 if Yahoo didn't go along



with an expansion of U.S. surveillance by surrendering online information, a step the company regarded as unconstitutional. At stake, according to the government, was the nation's security.

"International terrorists, and (redacted) in particular, use Yahoo to communicate over the Internet," the director of national intelligence at the time, Mike McConnell, said in a court document supporting the government's position. "Any further delay in Yahoo's compliance could cause great harm to the United States, as vital foreign intelligence information contained in communications to which only Yahoo has access, will go uncollected."

The outlines of Yahoo's secret and ultimately unsuccessful court fight against government surveillance emerged when a federal judge ordered the unsealing of some material about Yahoo's court challenge. Sections of some of the documents were redacted, such as the names of the terrorists McConnell cited.

In a statement Thursday, Yahoo said the government amended a law to demand user information from online services, prompting a challenge in 2007 during the George W. Bush administration.

"Our challenge, and a later appeal in the case, did not succeed," Yahoo general counsel Ron Bell said.

The new material about the case underscores "how we had to fight every step of the way to challenge the U.S. government's surveillance efforts," Bell added. "At one point, the U.S. government threatened the imposition of \$250,000 in fines per day if we refused to comply."

Bell said the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court upheld the predecessor to Section 702 of the FISA Amendments Act. Section 702 refers to the program called PRISM, which gave the government access to online communications by users of Yahoo.

Former National Security Agency systems analyst Edward Snowden disclosed the program last year.

Yahoo said it is committed to protecting users' data and that it will continue to contest requests and laws that it considers unlawful, unclear or overly broad.

"We consider this an important win for transparency, and hope that these records help promote informed discussion about the relationship between privacy, due process and intelligence gathering," Bell said.

The newly released documents show that the Bush administration was taking a hard line and was miffed that Yahoo had even been allowed to get into court with its complaint.

In sum, the FISA court erred in permitting Yahoo to challenge the directives, said a court brief signed by then-Attorney General Michael Mukasey.

Yahoo was arguing that what the Bush administration was doing violated the Fourth Amendment rights of customers of Yahoo customers.

"The government has conducted warrantless foreign intelligence surveillance for decades, and such surveillance has been upheld under the Fourth Amendment by every appellate court to decide the question,"

Mukasey wrote.

"The government's implementation of the Protect America Act is consistent with decades of past practice and adequately protects the privacy of U.S. persons," Mukasey said.

In its court papers, Yahoo urged that the government be reined in.

Yahoo requested that the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court of Review reverse the lower court's judgment and find that "the surveillance authorized by the directives is not 'otherwise lawful,'" wrote Marc Zwillinger, a lawyer representing the Internet service provider.

Yahoo lost the battle in the surveillance review court.

In a statement late Thursday, the Obama administration said it is "even more protective" of the rights of U.S. citizens than the law upheld by the review court.

The American Civil Liberties Union said the case shows the need for more openness about government surveillance.

"The secrecy that surrounds these court proceedings prevents the public from understanding our surveillance laws," ACLU staff attorney Patrick Toomey said. "Today's release only underscores the need for basic structural reforms to bring transparency to the NSA's surveillance activities."

#### Top Websites Will Participate in Internet Slowdown Day Protest

Internet Slowdown Day will be headlined by several major companies when Web users and so-called Net activists come together on Sept. 10 to demonstrate what the Internet might look like if so-called fast lanes are allowed as part of the new net neutrality rules that the Federal Communications Commission is currently considering.

Fight for the Future, the group behind the advocacy event, announced Thursday that several top websites including Reddit, Foursquare, Vimeo, Wordpress, and Boing Boing will take part in the online event.

Lest you be worried that your Internet service will get bogged down on Wednesday, fear not. Internet Slowdown Day is meant to be a symbolic protest.

Participating sites will display an infinitely-loading site loading icon to illustrate to visitors what the Web could be like if broadband providers are allowed to offer priority service as part of the upcoming net neutrality rules. The companies and activist organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union, Electronic Frontier Foundation, and Greenpeace will also call on visitors to contact their U.S. representatives and officially protest the fast lane aspect of the potential new regulation that had originally been proposed by FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler as part of the new net neutrality rules.

Net neutrality has long been a subject of debate on the Internet. The principle is simple: Internet service providers such as AT&T, Comcast,

Time Warner Cable, and Verizon and governments around the world should treat all Internet traffic the same. This means ISPs shouldn't block or slow down traffic on their local broadband networks based on individual users. And they shouldn't modify their services based on the type of traffic those users are accessing or by the type of service that's sending the content.

The FCC has been redrafting rules to protect this principle, since earlier rules adopted in 2010 were thrown out by a federal court in January. While Net activists all agree that new rules are necessary, they were unhappy with one aspect of the FCC chairman's original proposal. In that proposal leaked in April, the new rules would explicitly allow broadband providers to offer paid prioritization services to companies willing to pay for faster access to end users. These so-called fast lanes would act much like HOV lanes on a highway, allowing certain packets that are marked priority to travel in a less congested lane to their destination. This would allow some companies, such as the video service Netflix, to get its packets of streaming video through congested networks faster than other services, which haven't paid for access to the fast lane.

Fight for the Future argues that the proposed rules would allow major broadband providers to create a two-tiered Internet, with slow lanes (for most of us) and fast lanes (for wealthy corporations that are willing to pay fees in exchange for fast service). The organization also argues that the rules would hand power to Internet service providers and allow them to discriminate against online content and applications.

Wheeler has backtracked with regard to his original proposal thanks in large part to strong public backlash. He says the FCC will not allow an Internet of haves and have-nots to be created. But the current proposal that is still open for public comment does ask if there are any acceptable instances where paid priority should be allowed.

So far, the matter hasn't been decided. However, some of the most prominent online companies in the world, including Google and Facebook, have railed against this aspect of the proposed rules, and some industry pundits say that they would negatively affect competition on the Web.

### Net Neutrality Deadline, One More Time

Now's your chance to crash a government website by merely stating your opinion, again.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is feeling the cyber pressure with a digital deluge of consumer comments on proposed Net Neutrality rules. Net Neutrality is the principal under which the Web currently operates, regarding all (legal) Internet traffic as equal digital packets and not allowing discrimination based on fees.

The current brouhaha began in January when a D.C. court ruled that the FCC could not enforce Net Neutrality principals. It meant the FCC could not stop ISPs such as Verizon from charging companies like Amazon and Google extra fees to get onto a faster connection and reach consumers more easily. If the FCC wanted to protect Net neutrality it would have to craft new regulations (it has tried several times)- or reclassify broadband ISPs as utilities.

Which brings us to where we are now, with the FCC considering new rules that would allow big companies to pay ISPs for quicker access to consumers on so-called fast lanes (also referred to as paid prioritization). It would in turn make it more difficult for consumers to access smaller Web sites that could not pay the additional fees. The agency has stated that it would still not allow ISPs to discriminate based solely on content (such as religious or political views) or to favor their own services over competitors.

Not surprisingly, with the Internet now a part of our daily lives, the idea of squelching access or preventing the next Silicon Alley startup from reaching customers has people tweeted off. A "Battle for the Net" campaign that posted the dreaded spinning "loading" wheel on sites earlier this week generated so many comments to the FCC that the issue has now surpassed the infamous Janet Jackson wardrobe malfunction in terms of responses: roughly 1.5 million comments and counting.

To make a comment by the Monday, September 15, deadline, go to the FCC comments page and the Protecting and Promoting the Open Internet proceeding. An FCC blog indicates the site is having trouble keeping up, so the agency is now also accepting e-mail comments.

The main fight now is whether to allow this revamping of the Internet in the U.S. - it wouldn't slow down access elsewhere in the world - or to do as several courts have indicated and have the FCC reclassify broadband ISPs as utilities, falling under the so-called Title II regulations.

Title II is a hefty set of rules continually revamped over the years to ensure that what are regarded as essential utilities - phone and wireless companies - do not stymie competition by preventing access or charging exorbitant rates for service. Under Title II, the FCC could then do what they originally attempted to do and preserve Net Neutrality. The only other alternative is to base new rules on a two-paragraph rule called Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act designed to promote broadband deployment. But Section 706-based rules would not stop ISPs from charging companies for faster Internet access--and in the process curtailing consumer access to other online services. It would only emphasize the FCC's mandate to "remove barriers to infrastructure investment."

Common sense would indicate that ISPs are without question utilities, more essential to business, communications, healthcare, entertainment, and transportation than any telephone company ever was. From TVs arriving at a Walmart to trucks on I-95, to emergency responders racing to the scene of an accident, it all relies on the Internet as an essential utility. Even voice calls and television broadcasts have moved online.

While Internet firms have protested against the idea of pay-to-play Internet access for U.S. businesses, lobbyists for the ISPs and telcos have been trying out various arguments in favor of paid prioritization: New rules would increase much needed investment - or new rules would curtail the currently high level of investment. The lobbyists are confused because they're not sure which company's business they're trying to protect or even how to protect it.

But this battle isn't about picking one business over another. It's about consumers being able to choose what information and services they receive because, while businesses fight over fees, ultimately it's the consumer who pays all the bills.

## Five Million Gmail Addresses and Passwords Dumped Online

An archive containing nearly 5 million Gmail addresses and plain text passwords was posted Tuesday on an online forum, but the data is old and likely sourced from multiple data breaches according to one security firm.

A user with the online alias `tvskit` posted the archive file on a Bitcoin security forum called `btcsec.com` and claimed that over 60 percent of credentials found inside are valid.

We can't confirm that it is indeed as much as 60 percent, but a great amount of the leaked data is legitimate, said Peter Kruse, the chief technology officer of CSIS Security Group, a Danish security company that provides cybercrime intelligence to financial institutions and law enforcement.

CSIS researchers analyzed the data and concluded that it is up to 3 years old based on correlations with past leaks.

We believe the data doesn't originate from Google directly, Kruse said via email. Instead it's likely it comes from various sources that have been compromised.

This means that many of the leaked passwords do not correspond to Gmail or Google accounts, but to accounts on other sites where users have used their Gmail addresses as the user name.

CSIS has confirmation that at least five of the leaked user name and password pairs were never used as log-in credentials for Gmail or Google accounts. This enforces the idea that the data comes from compromises outside Google, though it's possible that they were all perpetrated by a single individual or group, Kruse said.

The security of our users is of paramount importance to us, a Google representative said Wednesday via email. We have no evidence that our systems have been compromised, but whenever we become aware that an account has been compromised, we take steps to help our users secure their accounts.

Even if many of the leaked credentials turn out not to be from Google, affected users might still want to change their passwords on websites where they used their Gmail address as the user name. A website called `isleaked.com` allows users to check if their email address is among those leaked.

## Microsoft Is Finally Shutting Down MSN Messenger

Microsoft has finally decided to shut down its MSN Messenger service, an instant messenger client launched in an era of the Internet when AOL's AIM still mattered.

The company previously stated that it planned to end support for MSN Messenger last year, choosing instead to focus on its much more popular Skype service. That makes sense considering that Skype has a bright future, as well as traction that scales beyond machines running

Windows-based operating systems. However, the company did permit the MSN Messenger service to continue running in China until now.

Now it plans to shut down support for MSN Messenger in China by the end of October, reports ZDnet. The move was likely the result of growing support for the chat service QQ from China-based Tencent, which understandably stole away users.

After October, users in China will need to start using Skype if they'd like a replacement messaging service from Microsoft.

### Facebook Testing Self-Destruct Option for Posts

Facebook is taking a page from Snapchat's book with a new feature that lets users set an expiration date for their posts.

Several users have spotted the new option, which lets you set a post to vanish from the site in either one hour, three hours, six hours, 12 hours, 24 hours, 2 days, or a week. At this point, the new feature is only available for some users on the Facebook iOS app.

"We're running a small pilot of a feature on Facebook for iOS that lets people schedule deletion of their posts in advance," a Facebook spokesperson confirmed to PCMag.com, in an email.

Unlike with Snapchat, however, these posts will not be removed from Facebook's servers after their expiration date. Facebook handles expired posts the same as if you manually hit delete on a post, meaning it immediately removes the information from its site and then deletes it from its offline backups and logs, which may take up to 90 days.

In other Facebook news, the social network also this week began rolling out a new feature that lets you see how many views a video posted to the site has received. The company is also testing a "related videos" feature in its mobile apps, helping users to discover more broadcasts similar to the one they just watched.

Meanwhile, Facebook last week added a tool that lets you review your privacy settings to ensure they're set up the way you want.

### The Kano Computer: A Beginner's Computer Kit Channels the Apple I

It's a story we're all familiar with: Two hungry young geeks meet in a garage to collaborate on something no one has ever seen. Their first product is a humble circuit board, hardly useful to anyone who isn't also a geek. But it ultimately leads to devices that change the world.

Of course I'm talking about the two Steves, Jobs and Wozniak. But I could just as easily be talking about two folks you probably haven't heard of.

Alex Klein and Yonatan Raz-Fridman are the co-founders of Kano, a brand-new startup that's looking to bring the ideals of early Apple and the Homebrew Computer Club that spawned Apple and many of the other early computer titans to a new generation.

The Apple I was essentially a circuit board with a power supply. To turn it into a working computer, you had to add your own case, keyboard, monitor, and other essential bits. The \$129 Kano kit is what a lot of early Apple I users might have wanted. It has the computer circuit board (the Raspberry Pi, which is widely available), but Kano also provides the case, wireless keyboard, WiFi dongle, cables, and Linux OS on a memory card. It's a nearly complete computer. (You'll still have to add the monitor yourself.)

The problem is not that kids have too much technology in their lives, says co-founder Klein. It's that there are so few opportunities to tinker with it. Hermetically sealed tablets and smartphones are wonderful devices that let you do amazing things, but you can't really mess around with them. You can't even replace the batteries.

The idea behind Kano was to create a computer that's so easy to build that an 8-year-old can do it. And then, once he's built it, he can learn how to program it.

I think I Kano? So the other day, for the first time in my long career in tech journalism, I built a computer. It took me about 15 minutes from unboxing to booting up, half of which I spent trying to figure out how to turn it on and connect the keyboard. (If I'd had an 8-year-old nearby, I'm sure I'd have gotten it done in half the time.)

It's amazingly simple: Slide the circuit board into one half of the clear plastic case; the other half snaps onto it with a click. Attach the speaker cable to pins on the motherboard and plug it into the sound jack. Insert the 8 GB SD card containing the OS into the memory slot, plug the WiFi and Bluetooth dongles into the USB slots, and then attach your own monitor via the HDMI cable.

When you're done, you've got a fully functioning, Internet-ready computer about the size of a Sony Walkman cassette player, if you're old enough to remember those.

But that is really the least interesting bit about the Kano (kah-no), which is named for Kano Jigoro, the inventor of judo. What makes this more than just a simple assembly project is the open-source software that comes with it (which is a modified version of Debian Linux).

For example, Kano features Pong — yet another ode to the early days of personal computing. But instead of merely playing Pong, you can customize it as you go by assembling colored blocks containing bits of code that connect together like puzzle pieces.

You start by changing the colors of the field or the lines, then the speed of the ball or the size of the paddles, then how the game reacts when the ball is hit or a key is pressed. Click the Make button to compile the code and run it, and then go back and debug it when things don't work the way you thought they would.

This concept isn't new. Kid-friendly tools like Scratch and Hopscotch also teach programming concepts by connecting puzzle pieces. The difference, Klein says, is that instead of creating things in a programming language that's used only for teaching, you're actually working in Python and JavaScript, two marketable programming languages.

Once you've mastered Pong, you can learn how to mod Minecraft. A brief

tutorial video walks you through the basics of creating landscapes you can share with other Minecrafters. Eventually you learn how to build castles and volcanoes. Kano can show you the actual code you're creating as you plug together the puzzle pieces.

Every time you master a new skill, you gain experience points and earn badges that you can post to your profile and share with other Kano users. Because everything about the Kano is open source, a community of developers—some of them still in elementary school—have built their own apps you can download to the device via the Kano World app store.

The next Apple??I got my hands on an early version of the kit, and some rough edges still show. I occasionally found myself lost at the command prompt during setup. Sometimes the CPU got overwhelmed and I had to reboot. But I've never used a version of Linux as intuitive and well designed as this one.

Kano is one of those Kickstarter success stories. The company asked for \$100,000 last December and hit its goal in 16 hours, ultimately collecting more than \$1.5 million. The first 13,000 backers are receiving their Kano kits this month.

You'll have to wait until later this fall before you can get your hands on one. Watch Yahoo Tech for an in-depth review when the final product is available.

Kano is part of a surge of new products designed to help kids create technology instead of just consuming it. The real point is to help kids discover how enjoyable that process can be, Klein says.

This is a chance to build something cool, he says. Not just so you can get a better job, but because it's fun.

## Leaked Windows 9 Screenshots Reveal The Future of The Desktop

Leaked Windows 9 screenshots have surfaced previously, but this time we're getting a closer look at how the desktop is transforming in the future release of Windows. German sites ComputerBase and WinFuture have obtained 20 photos of what appears to be the "Windows Technical Preview," which is expected to be made available later this month or in early October. The screenshots, from a Windows build provided to close Microsoft partners, provide an even closer look at the new Start Menu, and some obvious changes to the Windows taskbar.

Firstly, there's a new search icon next to the Start button on the taskbar, alongside what appears to be a button for the virtual desktops feature. In later screenshots the virtual desktops feature is demonstrated, with a pane along the bottom of the Windows desktop that allows you to switch between virtualized desktop areas. Windows 8-style apps can also be seen floating on the desktop in several screenshots, with app commands for search, share, play, and settings available in context menus within the apps.

Microsoft also appears to be readying new icons for File Explorer, Desktop, and other elements in Windows 9, a change that appears to flatten the UI out slightly to match its "Metro-style" look and feel on Windows 8. There's also an early look at what appears to be a



Notification Center which is accessed from the system tray area of the Windows taskbar. Microsoft is also making slight adjustments to the jump list menus in the taskbar (available when you right-click) to flatten out the UI.

Overall, the changes appear to be early and basic ready for the Technical Preview, but they'll be welcome additions to desktop users who are used to the familiar interface of Windows. The Verge has reached out to Microsoft to comment on the authenticity of the screenshots, and we'll update you accordingly.

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